

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 16, 2023

The Honorable Joe Biden
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I write in support of your efforts since the horrific terrorist attacks in Israel on October 7, 2023, to secure effective protections for innocent Palestinians and Israelis.

I applaud U.S. diplomatic efforts to work with regional partners, including Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Qatar, and others to increase access to humanitarian aid, and to facilitate the release of hostages, among other efforts. I also know that Secretary of State Antony Blinken has been crisscrossing the region since October 7 to meet with key stakeholders to help achieve key goals, including the release of hostages, increased provision of and access to humanitarian aid, and even negotiating humanitarian pauses in the fighting. Secretary Blinken recently attended a summit convened by the Jordanian foreign minister that was attended by several countries in the region. I know you remain personally engaged in direct contact with key stakeholders as well.

Your administration has also been declarative about Israel's right to defend itself and to address the threat posed by Hamas. However, you have also been very clear about the responsibility to do so in accordance with international law obligations to protect innocent civilians. I believe, as some of my colleagues have expressed, we must hold ourselves and our closest allies to the highest standards of conduct, including their responsibility to limit harm to non-combatants, and vulnerable populations.

Despite your ongoing efforts, the response to your calls to protect innocent Palestinian lives and to secure access to humanitarian aid have not been received with the urgency or seriousness that they demand. Israel is an ally and friend. However, friendship is a two-way street that requires concerns and issues to be shared mutually and considered fully.

I appreciate you forcefully pushing back against actions or words that undermine your efforts, including your strong response in opposition to recent comments that Israel may occupy Gaza for an indefinite period of time. Such statements do not move us closer to achieving your longstanding commitment to a two-state solution or Israel's security needs.

Just like you, I unequivocally condemn the Hamas attacks on Israel that took place on October 7th, in which Hamas killed over 1,000 Israelis and foreign nationals and took over 200 hostages. Hamas is a terrorist organization and does not represent or speak for the Palestinian people and in fact, has repeatedly acted to put hundreds of thousands of Palestinian lives at risk. Those attacks shook that nation and region as well as our own. Rockets continue to fly into Israel.

But we cannot be blind to the suffering and deaths of innocent Palestinians in Gaza, who have no safe place to go. A wider, deeper, and worsening humanitarian crisis does not benefit anyone. Access to humanitarian aid remains woefully insufficient. Your administration must push more forcefully to ensure adequate and sustained provision of humanitarian needs (food, water, power, etc.) in Gaza.

The humanitarian pauses your administration helped secure, despite naysayers, are welcomed but are not enough.

You must continue to effectively use our tremendous influence and leverage at your disposal to move us closer to an end to violence and back to a pathway to a durable and sustainable peace. We cannot go back to the deadly and destructive status quo.

Keep working towards peace. The lives of innocent civilians, both Israeli and Palestinian, depend on it. These efforts by your administration remain the best shot at achieving what we all want to see, an end to violence as soon as possible, security and safety for Israelis and Palestinians, and movement on a diplomatic path to permanent peace.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Owen Sorensen", is positioned above a solid black horizontal line.